

The Parables of Jesus
ii. Seeds, Weeds and Explosive Growth
Matt 13:24-43

Jesus continues to tell three parables about the Kingdom of God: the wheat and the weeds with an explanation to follow, the mustard seed and yeast. Whether Jesus told these parables in this precise order is a moot point. Matthew writes to a predominantly Jewish order and he collates his material accordingly to stress the primacy of the Kingdom in Jesus' teaching.

The Kingdom cannot be equated with the church, a mistake Augustine made in his interpretation which led to very grave consequences. The church in the Middle Ages became a coercive agency, relying on power and control. Constantine, the first 'Christian' emperor of the Roman Empire established a state church. He is reputed to have offered defeated opponents in war a choice, be baptised or be drowned! Little wonder that the church became a compromised body with nominal allegiance by many. The Crusades in attempting to impose Christianity by force on Islam had disastrous consequences, compounded by Islam's equating the gospel with western culture.

The church is the body of Christ, his bride made up of faithful believers i.e. good seed (v24) sowed by Jesus, the Son of Man (v37) not weeds, people of the evil one, sown by the devil. (vv38b,39) The context of this parable is the world invaded by the Kingdom of God. Of necessity the world comprises believers and unbelievers alike. True conversion is the result of the Holy Spirit's work bringing about conviction of sin and resultant repentance.

No one wins an argument. Manipulation and coercion are the tools of the enemy. The means God uses are persuasive grace and loving acts on the part of his people to win a hearing for the gospel. We are not responsible for 'success' as such, rather faithful, winsome witness on our part. There are many moral, upright unbelievers in the world who are examples of God's common grace. It behoves us therefore to be humble and authentic as we seek to witness with integrity and leave the results to God. It is ultimately God's prerogative to decide who is in or out of the Kingdom and the final outcome on the day of judgement is in his hands, not ours.

The mysterious nature of the Kingdom is highlighted by two further parables. The mustard seed, the smallest known in those days, has a remarkable outcome. Fully grown it offers nurture and security to random birds not unlike the tree in Ezekiel's prophecy. Moreover, a little yeast allows dough to rise and become edible and nutritious, enough to feed many people.

Jesus' words in conclusion should give us pause: either a 'blazing furnace' or 'shining like the sun' are the prospect which awaits the final day. (vv42,43) In the words of CS Lewis:

"Every day we walk on the razor edge between these two incredible possibilities... It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses. To remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature you would be tempted to worship or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations... There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal."

Jesus' parables of the Kingdom should awaken us to the urgency of the task before us as his followers entrusted with the good news of the gospel and the pressing need to share it winsomely and wisely.

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